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CAPTIVE AMERICANS FORCED TO SERVE VIET CONG
THE PILOT WASN'T FOOLED BY THE YANK'S VOICE

By Jim G. Lucas, Scripps-Howard Staff Writer

CAN THO, South Vietnam, Nov. 12--The voice came over the radio on an assigned military frequency. It told an American helicopter to land at the abandoned outpost of Cho Hoi and pick up a badly wounded man.

It was an American voice, but the chopper pilot had been forewarned. He ignored the request. Cho Hoi had been given up several weeks before and there was no reason to believe Americans were there.

But, U.S. officials authoritatively have learned that three of four Americans the Viet Cong have taken prisoner in the Mekong Delta are being made to serve their communist captors by training Viet Cong troops and signaling our helicopters on captured radios. Those who know the three men say they would only have acted under extreme pressure.

BALTIMORE

Capt. Humbert Versace of Baltimore, Lt. James Rowe of McAllen, Tex., and Sgt. Daniel Pitzer of Fayette, N.C., were captured near Tan Phu on Oct. 29, 1963. Tan Phu, since turned over to Vietnamese Self Defense Forces, was then a Special Forces post. Sgt. Edwin Johnson of Seaside, Calif., a battalion adviser, was captured near Vi Thanh last July 21.

Recurring reports have told of Americans being paraded thru Vietnamese hamlets and forced to make public confessions denouncing the United States. Last spring, the Ca Mau brigade swept thru the southern Delta trying futilely to find and free them.

No word is available on Sgt. Johnson, but Intelligence reports indicate Capt. Versace, Lt. Rowe, and Sgt. Pitzer are being forced to serve their captors.

According to these reports, the three are alive and well. Until last month, they were kept under guard. Since, their guards have been withdrawn. Escape, however, apparently is impossible. It is assumed they are still watched closely.

Americans here are convinced the Viet Cong have an American prisoner-of-war camp in Cambodia, and that they also take their wounded across the border.

"How else," asks a senior American adviser, "can you explain the fact we've found absolutely no trace of them in Vietnam?" And we have searched diligently. How can you explain the fact that--as many first aid stations as we've found--- we have yet to capture a wounded Viet Cong?"

The area around Cho Hoi and Ca Mau is near the border. The Viet Cong also hold the U-Minh forest, which backs up to the border. It would be possible for them to move American prisoners back and forth, almost at will.

(remainder of story does not mention prisoners)